



Senators Feinstein, Leahy and Kerry Sponsor Bill to Increase Pay for Federal Judges

*- Bill would safeguard the quality and independence of the federal judiciary -
February 10, 2006*

Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and John Kerry (D-Mass.) today introduced legislation to provide a 16% increase in the salary of federal judges whose pay has decreased by almost 40% since 1969 compared with the private sector.

“While fairness alone would require a reasonable salary for judges, the growing pay disparity between judges and other members of the legal profession poses a real threat to the quality of our judiciary,” Senator Feinstein said. **“In order to ensure that our judiciary can continue to attract, and keep, top attorneys, the judges’ salaries must be increased to at least make up for some of the loss in real pay that has taken place in the last three decades.”**

Senator Kerry said, **“Experienced judges should not be forced out of public service because they can’t afford to stay in. Americans deserve to have impartial, knowledgeable judges hearing their cases. An appropriate, competitive salary will help ensure our most experienced judges aren’t influenced by the highest bidder.”**

Since 1969, inflation adjusted salaries of federal judges have declined by almost 24%, while private sector salaries have increased by more than 15%. And in the same period of time that judges’ pay has declined by nearly 24%, the caseload of District Court judges has climbed by 58.4% and the caseload of Circuit Court judges has jumped 211.4%. Many first year law school graduates at the nation’s largest law firms make more than federal judges, and partners at these law firms routinely make three, four, or five times what federal judges make.

Judges are leaving the federal bench in greater numbers now more than ever before. Since 1990, 92 judges have left the bench, and of those 21 left before reaching retirement age. Fifty-nine of them stepped down to enter private law practice. In the past five years, 37 judges have left the federal bench, nine of them in the last year alone.

Specifically, the bill would:

- Increase the salaries of all federal judges by 16.5%;

- Terminate the linkage of Congressional pay increases to judicial pay increases, so that Congress's decision to deny itself pay raises will not also place that burden on federal judges; and
- Provide federal judges with annual cost of living adjustments based on the Employee Cost Index, an index already used by the federal government to help federal salaries keep up with inflation.

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